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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: SAVE VALLEY: STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON

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11. (SBU) Summary: Hammond Ranch, an American-owned property in a southeastern Zimbabwe nature conservancy, remains threatened by the continuing encroachment of settlers encouraged by GOZ land reform policies. The conservancy still hopes to reach an agreement with the settlers that will save one of Africa,s key wildlife sanctuaries. End Summary

SETTLERS AND LAND REFORM

12. (SBU) EconOff recently spent two days with George Hulme, the manager of Hammond Ranch (one of 27 properties which make up Africa,s largest private wildlife sanctuary, Save Valley Conservancy). Hulme explained that settlers from local communal lands and beyond now control conservancy lands on two sides of Hammond Ranch. Although the GOZ has not advocated the takeover, settlers have been encouraged by the general tenor of GOZ land reform policies. However, due to their inability to grow enough food to subsist on their new farms, Hulme said the settlers frequently cross onto Hammond Ranch property to poach, including setting fires to limit the ground where the animals can forage, making poaching that much easier.

13. (SBU) Beyond Hammond Ranch, Hulme said, settlers now threaten to split the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC) in two as those who settled on the eastern and western sides have migrated toward the SVC,s center. If this occurs, wildlife would have less space in which to live and the southern portion of SVC would be in danger of complete takeover by settlers. (N.B. Thus far, no settlers have moved into the northern section of the conservancy.)

14. (SBU) Hulme said another trouble spot is the Sabi River, which runs the length of SVC,s Eastern edge. The SVC and the commercial farmers who had owned the land East of the river came to an agreement that the entire river would belong to SVC. The commercial farmers had had their own irrigation systems and did not need the river for their crops. However, the new settlers on these properties now demand access to the river. Hulme expressed optimism that Hammond Ranch,s historic good ties with the local communal peoples will stall any takeover, and noted that SVC as a whole continues to assist local communities and even settlers to eke out a living.

15. (SBU) Commenting on the GOZ,s new wildlife policy announced earlier this year, Hulme said a 25 year lease-hold was too short a time for anyone to recoup a profit from the massive investment needed. The GOZ recently set up a committee from Masvingo province (where the SVC is located) to negotiate new terms. However, according to Hulme, these negotiations have now broken down with no new talks scheduled before the March parliamentary elections.

ELEPHANTS AND OTHER ANIMALS

16. (SBU) While a longer-term problem, Hulme noted that the burgeoning elephant population was also a threat to the conservancy. With no real natural predators and long life spans (50-60 years), elephants eat a disproportionate share of the food base and have begun crowding out other animals. Hulme told EconOff that no general SVC policy is in place, but SVC technical committees are working on potential solutions- that may include culling the herd or sending elephants to other conservation areas in Zimbabwe or other countries. However, he said culling the herd would only occur if Zimbabwe could export the ivory from the tusks (which would require a special exemption from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora). (N.B. Most other parks in Zimbabwe also have too many elephants and the costs of transporting them outside of Zimbabwe are astronomical.)

17. (SBU) Like other SVC properties, Hammond Ranch survives on

hunting safaris. Hulme told EconOff that many of the individual property owners would prefer to conduct only photographic safari tourism, but that those tourists are just not coming in sufficient numbers. In fact, he said, Hammond Ranch,s only photo tourism business for 2004 consisted of friends of the owners and Embassy personnel.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) With invading settlers and falling tourism squeezing them, the managers and owners of SVC are nonetheless continuing their passionate efforts to save African wildlife. In the end, Hulme and others can only hope that a negotiated settlement will be reached before it becomes too late to save the conservancy.

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